

## Sports

# Beijing Games organizers say virus 'biggest challenge', 100 days from start

## Millions under stay-at-home orders to contain small outbreaks

BEIJING: Protecting the Beijing Winter Olympics from the coronavirus is the "biggest challenge", organizers said yesterday, as millions of people in China were under stay-at-home orders to contain small outbreaks 100 days before the Games.

The Chinese capital will in February become the first host of a Summer and Winter Games, and last week welcomed the Olympic flame with a low-key ceremony. Case numbers remain low in China, with only three reported in Beijing yesterday and small clusters of infections elsewhere, but authorities nationwide are on edge.

The Chinese government has maintained a zero-COVID approach through rigorous measures that have seen millions told to stay at home, mass testing across at least 11 provinces and many flights and trains brought to a standstill. "The pandemic is the biggest challenge to the organization of the Winter Olympics," Zhang Jiandong, executive vice president of the Beijing Organizing Committee, told a press conference.

China's strict rules "can reduce the risks and impact of COVID-19", he said, adding that those in the Games' stringent bubble who fail to comply with anti-epidemic measures will face consequences,

including disqualification.

Zhang told reporters that "all preparations are complete" and venues finished. Coming just six months after the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Summer Games, the Winter Olympics will be held in a "closed loop" bubble. The estimated 2,900 athletes must be fully vaccinated or face 21 days' quarantine upon arrival. They will also be tested daily.



### Beijing first to host Summer, Winter Games

Some of the 2008 Summer Games venues will be used during the winter spectacle, including the "Bird's Nest" national stadium for the opening and closing ceremonies. But only people living in China will be allowed to buy tickets to attend the Games, which run from February 4 to 20. "The vaccination policy, a 'closed-loop' management system and regular testing are among the vital ele-

ments that will enable the Games to take place safely," the International Olympic Committee said yesterday.

#### 'Biggest concern'

As an outbreak linked to a travelling domestic tour group spreads, China reported 50 new domestic cases and rolled out a series of measures to try and contain the outbreak. The northwestern Ningxia region, which has recorded 14 new cases since Saturday, closed nearly 800 schools and authorities said they would test 3.5 million people in the regional capital Yinchuan for a second time, despite the initial round of samples all coming back negative.

Lanzhou, a city 720 miles (1,200 km) to the southwest of Beijing, went into lockdown Tuesday with authorities ordering its four million residents to stay home except in emergencies. In another locked-down county of 35,000 people in China's Inner Mongolia region, authorities were working to provide medicines for stranded domestic elderly tourists with chronic conditions, state media outlet Beijing News reported.

As the capital's countdown clock showed 100 days to go, Beijing residents said they were hoping for a successful Olympics untarnished by COVID-19. "The



BEIJING: A countdown clock shows 100 days until the opening of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, at the Olympic Park in Beijing on Tuesday. — AFP

biggest concern is the pandemic," resident Li Shuwei said. "I hope everyone can do a good job in protection and make the Beijing Winter Olympic Games a success."

In addition to the pandemic, boycott calls are also casting a shadow over the Games. Human rights activists last week

disrupted the flame-lighting ceremony in Greece. Campaigners have accused Beijing of repression in the northwestern Xinjiang region as well as Hong Kong and Tibet. China has consistently railed against what it calls the "politicization of sport". — AFP



SAN ANTONIO: Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers blocks the shot of Devin Vassell #24 of the San Antonio Spurs in third quarter at AT&T Center on Tuesday in San Antonio, Texas. — AFP

## Davis injury scare for Lakers, Warriors stay unbeaten

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers overcame the absence of LeBron James and an injury scare to Anthony Davis on Tuesday to beat the San Antonio Spurs in overtime as the Golden State Warriors extended their unbeaten start to the season.

Lakers star Davis finished with 35 points, 17 rebounds and four assists while Russell Westbrook weighed in with 33 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists in a 125-121 win over the Spurs in Texas. But the Lakers, already without James, who was struggling with right ankle soreness, were given a fright late in the fourth quarter when Davis crumpled to the court clutching his right knee.

Davis later recovered to help the Lakers close out their overtime win. Lakers coach Frank Vogel said afterwards the team would monitor Davis' injury for a possible reaction. "We'll just have to see how sore it is," Vogel said. "He just banged knees with one of their players. We'll see how he responds overnight."

Vogel meanwhile was pleased with how his side had battled back from a 12-point deficit in the fourth quarter. "We never lost belief, even when we were down, that we were going to win the game," Vogel said. "We just persevered and got a big road win."

In Oklahoma City, Stephen Curry scored 23 points as Golden State came from behind to extend their unbeaten start to the season with a 106-98 victory over the Thunder. Curry added six rebounds and four assists while Andrew Wiggins added 21 points to make it four wins out of four for the Warriors. Oklahoma City remain winless through four games.

The Warriors recovered after a shaky first half display which left them trailing 59-48 at the break, before a dominant third quarter which saw them outscore the Thunder 33-17. Otto Porter drained back-to-back three-pointers from the bench to close the third, transforming a one-point deficit into a five-point lead, while Damian Lee finished with 20 off the bench. Warriors coach Steve Kerr blamed a "poor defensive showing" for his team's first half struggles.

"What clicked was getting stops together," Kerr said. "We weren't clicking offensively, but the game starts at the defensive end, and we were not ready mentally ready. This is what happens in this league — you try to get up for every game, occasionally you have some letdowns. OKC played a great first half, and did everything right. But we've strung together four good wins and heading home we're in a good spot. We know we've got to just keep it going — things can change in a hurry in this league." — AFP

## State holding Australian Open says no to unvaccinated players

MELBOURNE: Unvaccinated players will not get special dispensation for the Australian Open, the top official in the state holding the Grand Slam said yesterday, potentially ruling out reigning men's champion Novak Djokovic. A leaked email earlier this week suggested that players who were not inoculated against the coronavirus would be able to take part as long as they completed 14 days' quarantine.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison then said that unvaccinated players would be permitted to enter the country if they received an exemption, which the host state Victoria would need to apply for on behalf of players. But Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews quickly ruled that out.

"We are locking people who are unvaccinated out of pubs, cafes, restaurants and the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) and all sorts of other events," he said. "We're not going to be applying for an exemption. Therefore, the issue is basically resolved."

Australia's federal government controls the country's border and issues visas. But during the pandemic state governments have run quarantine facilities and imposed vaccine mandates, making it

## Braves rout Astros in first game of World Series

LOS ANGELES: Jorge Soler smashed a home run on the first swing of the game and Adam Duvall blasted a two-run homer as the Atlanta Braves rolled over the Houston Astros 6-2 in the opening contest of the World Series on Tuesday.

The Braves, who are in their first World Series since 1999 and haven't won the Fall Classic since 1995, used a blistering start to post five runs in the first three innings and never looked back. Both starting pitchers exited the game early, the Braves Charlie Morton with a broken leg and Astros Framer Valdez after giving up five runs on eight hits in just two innings in his World Series debut.

Braves closer Will Smith got the final out in the ninth inning by forcing Michael Brantley to ground out to second base. "It was huge to get this first one tonight," said Braves third baseman Austin Riley. "The series is far from over."

The win was costly for the Braves, who lost Morton for the rest of the best-of-seven World Series with a broken right fibula after he was hit by a ground ball. The 37-year-old Morton took an inning to find his form so it was left to the Atlanta batters to deliver the early fireworks in front of a crowd of 40,060 at Minute Maid Park in Houston, Texas.

The Astros, who lost in seven games to Washington in the 2019 World Series, are back in the title matchup for the third time in five seasons. Houston manager Dusty Baker said the bounces went in favor of the Braves. "Tomorrow is another day and who knows," said Baker, who is in the World Series for the first time since 2002. "The way I look at it is tomorrow the ball is going to bounce our way."

The Braves wasted no time getting off on the right foot as designated hitter Soler hit a lead off home run to make it 1-0. Soler took two balls then launched a 382 foot hit into left field. Three batters later Riley hit an RBI double, scoring Ozzie Albies as the Braves took an early 2-0 lead.

Atlanta's Morton survived a scare in the first



MELBOURNE: A new show court is fitted out at a venue of the Australia Open tennis tournament park in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

unclear who will get the final say on the Australian Open rules.

Nine-time Australian Open champion Djokovic is one of many players who have refused to share their vaccination status, casting doubt over whether he will defend his title at Melbourne Park in January. This year's Australian Open was hit hard by the pandemic with all players going through two weeks of quarantine, while crowds were restricted and a five-day snap lockdown called mid-event.

A leaked WTA (Women's Tennis Association) email

on Monday had suggested unvaccinated players will be allowed to compete at the 2022 event if they complete hotel quarantine and submit to regular coronavirus testing. Fully vaccinated players are expected to be able to enter Australia without quarantining or being confined to bio-secure bubbles, the email added. Tennis Australia said earlier this week it was working with both the Victorian and federal governments on conditions for players, saying it was "optimistic that we can hold the Australian Open as close to pre-pandemic conditions as possible". — AFP



HOUSTON: Jorge Soler #12 of the Atlanta Braves hits a solo home run against the Houston Astros during the first inning in Game One of the World Series at Minute Maid Park on Tuesday in Houston, Texas. — AFP

inning as he fell behind the Houston hitters, who loaded the bases. But Morton got right fielder Kyle Tucker to ground out to first to end the inning stranding three runners on base.

The Braves tacked on another run in the second when Soler grounded into fielder's choice to the shortstop and Travis d'Arnaud scored. Atlanta threatened to score more runs but also left the bases loaded in their half of the inning. Braves made it 5-0 when Duvall belted a homer to left field in the third which scored outfielder Eddie Rosario.

Atlanta are first team in history of World Series to score a run in each of the first three innings of game one. Duvall's home run chased Valdez from the mound. A half inning later, the Braves lost Morton, who had been hit earlier by a grounder that went off his right ankle. He initially stayed in the game but the ankle started swelling up, and it became too painful for him to continue. He was

replaced by lefthander AJ Minter.

The Braves announced during the game that Morton had suffered a right fibula fracture and would miss the rest of the World Series. Morton struck out three and allowed no runs on one hit in a little over two innings of work. Pitcher Jake Odorizzi, who replaced Valdez, put a stop to the bleeding for the Astros by striking out Riley to end the top of the fourth inning.

Astros got their first run in the bottom of the fourth when Braves shortstop Dansby Swanson made an error on a routine grounder that allowed Kyle Tucker to score and cut the lead to 5-1. It was the first error by a Braves infielder in the playoffs. Swanson scored the Braves final run in the eighth when Freddie Freeman hit a sacrifice fly to right field. Minter was credited with the win after striking out three and allowing just one run in two-plus innings of work. — AFP